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AUTHOR Reenstjerna, Frederick R.
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ABSTRACT

Traditional professional library education since 1946 has centered on the master's degree, often called the Master of Library Science (MLS). A review of historical literature and characteristics of the profession suggest that the library-specific MLS degree can be replaced with alternative graduate programs which provide equivalent or superior education through extant curricula. This change would also reduce administrative costs for the program. The MLS example can be generalized to administrative and planning applications for other academic programs. It is suggested that acculturation to librarianship can be provided through a certification program, rather than a degree program. A certification program would provide a brief postgraduate experience that would unite the various specialists in a common understanding of the cultural parameters of the librarian's role. The core knowledge for professional librarians could be summarized in the following curriculum: Organization of Information (6 hours); Evolution of the Library as an Institution (3 hours); and Public Information Services (3 hours). Contains 14 references. (KM)

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Alternatives to Graduate-Degree Professional Education: Generalizing from the Library-Science Model

by

Frederick R. Reenstjerna
Marshall University

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ABSTRACT

Traditional professional library education since 1946 has centered on the master's degree, often called the MLS. A review of historical literature and characteristics of the profession suggest that the library-specific MLS degree can be replaced with alternative graduate programs which provide equivalent or superior education through extant curricula. This change would also reduce administrative costs for the program. The MLS example can be generalized to administrative and planning applications for other academic programs.

INTRODUCTION

On January 5, 1887, Melville Dewey opened the first graduate school for the education of professional librarians (Miksa, 1986). The program was offered at Columbia University, and the curriculum included "the practical details of library economy and administration." (quoted in Miksa, 1986, p. 372). Dewey's school envisioned a continuum of education for study by professional librarians, with education ranging from an undergraduate program (the BLS, a five-year curriculum) through graduate (the MLS) to doctoral studies (the DLS degree). Dewey's program was moved from Columbia to Albany, New York, in 1889,where it was established as part of the New York State Library. The first MLS degree was awarded in 1905 (Robbins-Carter and Seavey, 1986).

This paper addresses questions about the nature of professional education for library work, evaluating the proper role of higher-education institutions in that process. The authors will identify needed skills for professional librarians, and will suggest cost-effective educational alternatives which can deliver results equal or superior to the traditional program.

BRIEF HISTORICAL REVIEW OF LIBRARY EDUCATION

The movement to develop library work as a profession achieved its first success in the late nineteenth century. The decades of the

1870s and 1880s were seminal years for professional organizations: the American Bar Association and the American Library Association were both organized in 1876. The development of Johns Hopkins University and the University of Chicago, with their emphasis on graduate education, re-enforced public as well as professional attitudes equating increased education with superior professional ability (Rudolph, 1962). Thus, library education developed in conjunction with an enhanced social awareness of professional standing.

At this critical juncture, library professionalization departed from the path followed by law and medicine. While law and medicine established educational requirements for all practitioners of their profession, librarians advocated their requirements only for middle-level professional staff in libraries--abdicating control of the institutions for their professional practice to persons with little or no expertise in librarianship. This condition was endorsed by the American Library Association in 1905 as completely acceptable, given that some people were "born librarians" requiring no formal training (Miksa, 1986).

Library education also emphasized the practical over the theoretical--another departure from other evolving professions. Although Dewey had envisioned a philosophical basis for the profession of librarianship (Miksa, 1986), library education remained essentially a training activity rather than a theory-based undertaking.

At times, this emphasis was carried to the point of absurdity. The American Library Association in the 1920s arranged for W. W. Charters, an expert in job analysis, to develop educational tools for librarians. Charters' idea of job analysis consisted of identifying the basic task elements in a particular type of work, and describing appropriate optimization techniques for these elements. Charters approached the profession of librarianship as a series of routine clerical tasks, and his educational materials reflected this orientation (Richardson, 1983).

The weaknesses in Charters' approach were numerous, and the attitude which it demonstrated toward librarianship--i.e., that the profession was actually a collection of clerical functions devoid of any higher intellectual process--was detrimental to all, librarians and non-librarians, who attempted to view librarianship as a profession (Richardson, 1983).

Library professional education was strengthened by the Williamson Report of 1923, which advocated an undergraduate degree as a minimal requirement for entry into library school (Conant, 1980, p. 171). The master's degree thus became the preferred entry professional educational credential, and it was very quickly adopted as a uniform standard. This master's degree was a six-year program, comprising two years' work past the bachelor's degree . In the post-World-War-II era, a revised master's degree became established. This degree (the contemporary M.L.S.) was a fifth-year master's degree

without specifically-required undergraduate subjects (Robbins-Carter and Seavey, 1986).

The Conant Report in 1980 recommended a return to a two-year graduate program (Conant, 1980). Such an expanded program would provide time for specialization in particular sub-disciplines, internships or practica, and coursework in the theoretical foundations of librarianship (Conant, 1980). While the pedagogical rationale of Conant is soundly articulated, Subramanyam (1983) concludes that "[t]he possibility of instituting two-year master's degree programs in American library schools appears to be quite remote." (p. 300).

Almost simultaneous with internal pressures to upgrade professional library education (exemplified by the Conant Report) have been external pressures to de-professionalize (or at least to "de-credentialize") librarianship. The United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has attempted to lower the entry grade of Federal civil-service professional librarians, citing lack of demonstrable differences between practitioners holding master's degrees and those lacking such credential (Berry, 1985, p. 24-25).

QUALTIES OF THE PROFESSIONAL LIBRARIAN

Historically, librarians have come from an educational background in liberal arts. This was thought to be an appropriate, generalist background for readers' advisors who

might have to deal with a broad spectrum of inquiries. Miksa observes that Dewey emphasized "that to have an encyclopedic knowledge meant to have a wide knowledge of books, that is, of their subject contents." (Miksa, 1986, p. 370).

Shera (1972) offers a contemporary restatement of the necessary qualifications of professional librarianship. He observes that the interdisciplinary nature of librarianship requires a preparatory education that spans traditional departmental lines. "Thus an inescapable conclusion would seem to be that a sound liberal education during the secondary school and undergraduate years is a prerequisite for every librarian (p. 328).

The client relationship of professional librarians further dictates certain requisite characteristics. Librarianship is an interpersonal profession: "the focal point of this activity is that moment when a book, a graphic record, passes into the hands of the reader....This is the sine qua non of librarianship in relation to which the relevance of all other possible activities must be judged." (Shera, 1972, p. 197-198).

From the inception of formal library education to the present day, we see a focus upon qualitative, interpersonal skills as the central definition of professional work. Although certain disciplines (e.g., counseling, social work) have developed a knowledge base centering on interaction skills, librarianship has neglected this element in its formal education. Even today, emphasis in library education--and on

ideal library education--stresses quantitative skills rather than systematically-learned interpersonal skills ("The MLB," 1984; Griffiths, 1985).

PROBLEMS OF PROFESSIONAL DEFINITION

From its inception, library education has exhibited a tension between theory and practice as its basis. Part of this problem comes from dichotomous expectations of educators and practitioners. Educators are concerned with development of a philosophical basis for the profession, while practitioners' concerns focus on the abilities of library-school graduates to perform efficiently from their first assignments (Conant, 1980; Shera, 1972). Over-emphasis on technique has caused librarianship to be viewed skeptically by other academic professions, questioning the validity of such vocational orientation in a graduate university curriculum.

Practical orientation is not per se a negative quality within graduate education. The medieval universities were essentially guilds, whose organization and vocational orientation were not significantly different from other craft unions of the time (Haskins, 1957). Modern ideas of the university as a center for research--both pure and applied--are barely more than a century old, and derive from the successful German model arising in the nineteenth century (Perkin, 1984). Both interpretations of the university's role are historically and programmatically valid; one model does not exclude the other.

While a vocational or training orientation is insufficient to challenge library education as a suitable graduate subject, the lack of a central, coherent philosophy is cause for such a challenge. Writers about library education seem unable to identify a uniform knowledge base which would define the profession ((McGrath, 1985; Robbins-Carter and Seavey, 1986; White, 1985). Library schools still demonstrate a wide disparity in objectives (Conant, 1980), showing philosophical problems revealed almost two decades ago (cited in Shera, 1972, p. 391-392).

Lack of disciplinary uniqueness is another concern for library education, since duplication of existing higher-education programs is not feasible in today's economic environment. Librarianship is at best "still largely a derivative profession, not yet a discipline in its own right, well down on the reductionist hierarchy." (McGrath, 1985, p. 219).

The professionalization of librarianship has been hampered by a number of external factors. One critical factor is the comparatively-poor economic standing of librarianship. Such standing can retard efforts to improve professional quality through education. As White (1985) writes, "A $15,000/year starting salary for a fifth-year degree is already pitifully low, and we know both that some employers expect more education and that others pay less (and some do both)." (p. 179).

Another factor in the evolution of professional librarianship is the impact of cultural stereotyping and role definition. The bulk of students from the inception of professional library schools have been overwhelmingly female (Robbins-Carter and Seavey, 1986; Miksa, 1986; Daniel, 1986), yet the administrators of libraries (especially at the outset of professionalization) were almost all male (Miksa, 1986). The top-level practitioners in the profession were often not products of the professional schools. Such modeling--setting lower educational standards for institutional leaders than for middle-level professionals--has served to re-enforce public perceptions of the "non-professionalism" of librarianship, as revealed by recent attitudinal research (McCrady, 1986).

DECISIONS FOR ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATORS

The growth of professional schools in conjunction with university development is a phenomenon of the past century (Rudolph, 1962; Parsons, 1975), and all university administrators must decide their particular institution's mission concerning to professional education. Since administrators must allocate scarce resources among the number of professional schools associated with their campuses, they should consider the social significance of each profession. McCrady (1986) concluded that librarianship was not perceived by the public as a profession requiring the level of control and regulation attributed to law and medicine. While public opinion is

not often a central factor in academic program decisions, such expressions are valid in the case of professional schools, since their ostensible purpose is to develop skilled practitioners for society (Parsons, 1975). At the societal level, therefore, librarianship does not apparently warrant the resources of an independent, graduate professional program.

A second critical variable for administrators is the definition of a professional curriculum. Librarians have written extensively about the nature of professional education ((Shera, 1972; Conant, 1980; Robbins-Carter and Seavey, 1986), but they have not agreed upon a specific curriculum which could be implemented in a disciplinary manner--as contrasted with law, medicine, or social work. The task of defining a profession is complicated by the growth of information-related studies in wholly-unrelated disciplines--a collection of studies generally referred to as "information science." (Griffiths, 1985; Gibbons, 1983).

The nature of graduate education for librarianship in the past century is a third factor for administrative consideration over support of separate, professional library programs. Librarianship has been excessively concerned with the extant working environment, to the exclusion of research about its discipline (Shera, 1972, chapter 12; White, 1985). While the emphasis on research production by faculty may be particularly a United States phenomenon ((Gibbons, 1983), it is nonetheless an essential element of quality graduate-level

education programs--as viewed by university administrators and their peers. Some professionals in librarianship (Berry, 1986) find the quality of library research improving, but there is not yet the substantial body of unique knowledge associated with a profession.

University decision-making is not without its political component--in the fullest sense of the term, "political" (Baldrige et al., 1977). Recent research on factors influencing closure of graduate library schools has indicated that "philosophical and social isolation, and a perception that library programs are 'superfluous' to the university mission" were dominant forces in such closures. (Berry, 1986, p. 31; Holley, 1986, p. 706). In deciding to eliminate a graduate program, administrators might want to consider alternative programs available at their institution which accomplish the same mission. Such substitution of one item for another is a rational economic decision.

AN ALTERNATIVE SOLUTION FOR LIBRARY EDUCATION

Alternatives to the master's-level library curriculum already exist in other academic programs. These alternatives are cost-effective, and they could be a qualitative improvement over the current MLS-type program. The following recommendations begin with a definition of the requisite skills to be developed, and from that definition a program is deduced.

There is some core of knowledge, possession of which defines the owner as a "librarian" (e.g., Shera, 1972; Conant, 1980; Daniel,

1986) The problem has been to specify a general core which at the same time takes into account the opportunities for specialization within librarianship. Shera (1972) adopts a traditional, institution-based definition of the librarian. "The fundamental knowledge of the librarian can be understood only in terms of the function, or role, of the library; for the doctrine of the architect that form follows function may be applied, as well, to social structures. The librarian, regardless of the kind of clientele he serves, may be said to be concerned with the interaction of human minds communicating across the barriers of space and time through the media of graphic records, the content of which may be conveyed through the senses of sound and touch, as well as sight." (Shera, 1972, p. 204).

Shera's definition eliminates from consideration the number of "information workers" who do not have the title "librarian." This segment is an increasing component of the population employed in managing information transfer--and they are employed outside the institutions called libraries (Griffiths, 1985). Further, Shera's definition concentrates on traditional media as the instrument of the librarian's craft. While the demise of the book is not as imminent as some predictions have assumed (McGrath, 1985, p. 220), the expansion of the universe of informational media must be accepted by any profession claiming to educate managers of that information.

Simultaneously to its generalist orientation, library education has strong influences guiding it in the opposite direction toward

specialization. These increasing needs are at the base of modern advocacy for a two-year professional education program (Conant, 1980): they combine general and specific training in one degree program.

Extension of the library education program, however, overlooks an obvious issue: professional training in the skills areas already exists in other university programs. To expand Shera's definition of librarianship past graphic media, we may paraphrase that a professional librarian is concerned with the interaction of human minds communicating across the barriers of space and time through various media of information storage, retrieval, and dissemination. Given that generalist basis, we must recognize that society's complexity dictates specialization in certain types of information management.

Appropriate information-manipulation skills may be obtained within a graduate education in a client- or medium-specific subject. For example, a person aspiring to be a professional librarian working primarily with children can obtain most of his/her requisite skills through a master's degree in education. Another individual, whose primary concern is with the literature of a particular discipline, could learn the literature of that discipline through a specific graduate degree.

At least one author ("The MLB", 1984) has suggested a business degree within the context of library schools in order to prepare

professional librarians for the management decisions they must make. Given the range of degree programs already available in management, it is not necessary for librarianship to re-invent the wheel by developing its own management curriculum. Nevertheless, the author has identified a critical part of the library administrator's knowledge base which is lacking in current MLS programs--either in toto, or in the depth which is required.

RECOMMENDATION: CERTIFICATION IN A PROFESSIONAL CULTURE

With such an eclectic assembly of graduate training as librarianship offers, how can a professional culture be developed? The existence of a culture of librarianship has been championed and, to a great extent, delineated by many writers (Shera, 1972, chapter 6; Robbins-Carter and Seavey, 1986; Conant, 1980, chapter 6). Shera specifies eight objectives of graduate library professional education. The first two are most significant:

"1. A fundamental understanding of the role of the library in the communication process of society together with the historical development of the library and of library materials as social instrumentalities shaped by and responding to their coeval culture.

2. A comprehension of the basic theory and the appropriate systems for the organization and interpretation of library materials, and especially the intellectual content of those materials, together with the necessary skill to deal practically with the techniques and

routines relating to library organization and use." (Shera, 1972, pp. 362-363).

This acculturation to librarianship can be provided through a certification program, rather than a degree program, providing a brief postgraduate experience which would unite the various specialists in a common understanding of the cultural parameters within which they operate as "librarians." Such a program, additionally, would probably achieve more uniformity of graduates than the current system of library schools, where individual schools can be dominated by singular philosophies (Conant, 1980).

A certification program could involve no more than 9 to 12 semester hours of coursework. Writers such as Shera (1972) and Conant (1980) have predicated the existence of a core of knowledge which is essential to the profession of librarianship. Shera furthermore suggested a subject specialty degree in tandem with library training , as one alternative to extending the MLS program: "...let the specialists be trained in other schools, with the essentials of librarianship to their programs in capsule form by the library staff or by librarians added to the faculty for this purpose..." (page 373). Shera's tone indicates that he views this alternative somewhat disparagingly, but it could be viable within a certification program.

The core knowledge to be communicated for professional librarians could be summarized in the following curriculum:

I. ORGANIZATION OF INFORMATION. (6 semester hours)

Miller (1978) offers a complete conceptual approach to information organization through general systems theory. Within this intellectual structure, information transfer can be studied as one of several subsystems common to all systems--with systems being defined as biological or social structures, ranging from unicellular organisms to international organizations. Miller's work, representative of recent work in general systems theory, provides a mechanism for integrating an "interdisciplinary discipline" such as librarianship, with its emphasis on practitioner preparation in general studies (Boaz, 1983; Shera, 1972; Conant, 1980)).

This course explores fundamental concepts of information systems, using general systems theory and information science (Saracevic, 1970) as the pedagogic bases. The principles learned in this course will provide students with tools to analyze information systems--from classification plans to computer-based information systems.

II. EVOLUTION OF THE LIBRARY AS AN INSTITUTION. (3 semester hours)

The library is a social institution which has been influenced by, and has influenced, other elements in society. This ongoing inter-relationship has produced unique systems for information storage and retrieval. Through the second of these core courses, students will gain an appreciation of the library as an institution--distinct from the generalized information-transfer systems described in Core Course I.

This course will conclude with a description of standard library organizational structure.

III. **PUBLIC INFORMATION SERVICES**. (3 semester hours).

Students will learn essential techniques for determining client information needs, and locating the information sources to meet those needs. The course will combine effective client interview methods with a review of essential published and computer-based information resources, and their effective use.

Specialization would occur within the subject discipline--management, education, computer science, or history, for example--and library certification would be a standardized acculturation to a particular mode in which that specialization can be applied. A certified professional librarian with a master's degree in business or public administration., therefore, would be preferable as a library manager to a candidate holding a management degree without library knowledge or the holder of an MLS with no expertise in management.

THEORY INTO PRACTICE: QUSETIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Careful scrutiny of the nature of professional education, as in the case of librarianship, demonstrates that all programs do not necessarily require the full trappings of academic hierarchy. Academic administrators faced with critical decisions on programs--either adoption, recission, or curricular modification--should evaluate their decisions based on these questions:

- Does the profession have a definable knowledge base? There may be more than one such base, but each must be able to demonstrate a coherent knowledge base. For example, a graduate program in psychology might be dominated by behaviorists, cognitive theorists, or some other school of thought, but its philosophy represents a coherent body of theory.
- Does the profession have a unique knowledge base? As librarianship demonstrates, derivative professions are based upon information already existing in other curricula. Rather than creating copies of existing curricula, serious consideration should be given to discriminating between duplicative and original content. In some professions, as with librarianship, the unique core knowledge may be sufficient for a certification program, but insufficient for a graduate degree.
- Does the profession require regulation for societal protection? The university's mission includes certification of professions to the general public, but not all professions require the same level of governance. Administrators should weigh societal expectations against available resources when determining the status of professional programs on campus.

Duplication of instructional and administrative costs can be avoided through close attention to the clarity of a profession's philosophy, and the relationship of its knowledge base to existing

academic programs. University administrators must apply their managerial expertise to the assessment of professional educational programs, to determine the educational delivery system which best meets societal needs for any given discipline.

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